

## Romance, Marriage, and Social Class in the Saga World

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It is hard to imagine a more romantic scene than the one portrayed in two Icelandic sagas, *Vatnsdœla saga*, and *Hallfreðar saga*, involving Ingólfr and Valgerðr.<sup>1</sup> During a ball game in Northern Iceland one of the players, the young Ingólfr, happens to roll a ball in the direction of Valgerðr, one of the spectators. Coyly hiding the ball under her cloak, she declares that the person who has thrown it shall fetch it. Ingólfr forsakes the game and talks with her for the rest of the day, finding her “remarkably beautiful.” Thus starts one of the most famous love affairs in the saga literature. The love was mutual and lasted a lifetime. The story is interesting not only because it is mentioned in two sagas, but also because it has a pendant in the same two sagas involving another couple, Hallfreðr and Kolfinna. Furthermore, Valgerðr and Hallfreðr were siblings. At some point the couples undoubtedly consummated their relationship. Eventually the four were married but not to their first love. Clearly something went wrong in these

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1. This is a reworked and enlarged version of an article entitled “Extramarital Sex and Social Class in the Saga World” originally written in 1997 for a Festschrift to honor Professor Aaron Gurevich on his 75th birthday. I presented it as a paper at the 1998 meetings of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study. The Gurevich Festschrift was published in Russian by the Russian Academy of Sciences and appeared in Moscow in the year 2000. This reworking has been done with the permission of one of the editors, Dr. Maria Paramonova. While my essay has been under its Russian wrap Torfi Tulinius has published an essay in which he arrives at some of the same conclusions as in my original essay; see Torfi H. Tulinius, “The Prosimetrum Form 2: Verses as an Influence in Saga Composition and Interpretation,” in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. Russell Poole (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), pp. 199–205.

romances. The purpose of this article is to illuminate the problems the two couples encountered in their romantic and married lives.

The mutual interest of two young people will invariably raise the specter of extramarital sex for parents or guardian of the young woman. Nonetheless, it is obvious that sexual activities outside marriage were ubiquitous in medieval Iceland according to all literary genres as well as other sources. The phenomenon is particularly obvious in the contemporary sagas, such as *Sturlunga saga*, where most men are depicted as having concubines. The problem even caught the attention of the papacy,<sup>2</sup> but it also appears in the Sagas of Icelanders in the form of occasional mistresses and, more clearly, in the common topos of the illicit love visit.<sup>3</sup> Such visits occurred when an unmarried man took a fancy to a young girl and came to see her regularly with the purpose, not of marriage but of seduction. The family would have allowed marriage at any moment if the suitor would follow proper procedures, but such visits dishonored the family and devalued the woman in future marriage negotiations. Asked to stay away, the man might comply for a while, but eventually his continued attention to the woman would initiate a series of murderous actions that often dominated the rest of the narrative and brought death to the suitor in the end.

Neither violence nor social disapproval, however, presented sufficient deterrents for high-ranking young men in such matters. The two related episodes referred to above, both depicted in *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Hallfreðar saga*, illustrate the different treatment of two young men who engaged in illicit love visits but who belonged to different social classes.<sup>4</sup> Ingólfr and Hallfreðr each visited and seduced a young

2. The Icelandic problem was brought to the attention of Innocent 3; see Jenny Jochens, "The Church and sexuality in medieval Iceland," *Journal of Medieval History* 6 (1980), p. 386.

3. See Jenny Jochens, "The Illicit Love Visit: An Archaeology of Old Norse Sexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1991), pp. 357–92.

4. *Vatnsdæla saga* will be cited from Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed. *Vatnsdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 8 (Reykjavík, Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1949), pp. 1–131. (*Vtn* followed by page number). *Hallfreðar saga* exists in a shorter version (from *Möðruvallabók*) also published in Íslenzk fornrit 8 (pp. 134–200) and in a longer inserted in sections into *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*; a third version found in *Flateyjarbók* seems to conflate these two. Since the differences in the manuscripts are important, *Hallfreðar saga* will be cited from Bjarni Einarsson, ed. *Hallfreðar saga* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977) that includes all versions, indicating manuscript (*M*, 61 and 62 (for *Óláfs saga*) and *F* respectively) and page number.

woman, Valgerðr and Kolfinna respectively. Both cases produced violence, but Ingólfr, the son of a chieftain, got away with this behavior throughout his life, whereas Hallfreðr, the son of a farmer, was forced to leave the country. The stories are particularly interesting because Hallfreðr and Valgerðr were siblings. Their father Óttarr therefore faced the double problem of successfully curtailing the sexual aggression of his own son while at the same time suffering humiliation from not being able to prevent the continued visits to his daughter from another young man. Eventually, Óttarr was forced to leave the region thus removing his daughter.

The action takes place in Vatnsdalur in Northern Iceland in the late tenth century. The chieftain in the area was Þorsteinn at Hof. He had two sons, Ingólfr and Guðbrandr, of whom the older became chieftain in due course. Further to the south, at Grímsstungur, lived Óttarr. Born in Norway, he had sailed to Iceland with his foster brother Ávaldi in their own ship after successful Viking expeditions to England and Orkney. Óttarr obtained land in exchange for the ship and Ávaldi stayed with him the first winter, supposedly working for him. The following spring Ávaldi bought land at Knjúkur further north in the valley beyond Hof and near the lake Þórdísarlækur. He married a certain Hildir and the couple had a daughter, Kolfinna, and a son, Brandr.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile Óttarr had become acquainted with his neighbor Óláfr at Haukagil north of Grímsstungur. Óláfr was rich, and when Óttarr married his daughter Ásdís she brought a large dowry. The couple had three children, the sons Hallfreðr and Galti and the daughter Valgerðr.<sup>6</sup> Hallfreðr, who became a famous poet, was fostered by his grandfather Óláfr.<sup>7</sup> The children at Grímsstungur and Knjúkur were about the same age, with the boys at Hof probably a little older.

5. He is called Hermundr in *Vtn* p. 123.

6. The boys were named after Óttarr's maternal relatives.

7. Marianne Kalinke provides a Freudian interpretation of *Hallfreðar saga*, arguing that the hostility between Hallfreðr and his father explains the young man's attachment to King Óláfr; see Marianne Kalinke, "Stæri ek brag: Protest and Subordination in *Hallfreðar saga*," *Skáldskaparmál* 4 (1997), pp. 50–68. She probably overemphasizes the hostility. Fostering was a common phenomenon in the North; Óttarr himself had been sent out for fostering as a child. Hallfreðr stayed with his grandfather until he left for Norway. In turn he sent his own two sons out to be fostered. His departure for Norway does not entail a complete break with his father and grandfather, as Kalinke suggests. Regarding his yearly returns to Iceland all manuscripts state that he landed in the south, an area to where his father has been forced to move with the purpose of preventing Ingólfr from visiting Valgerðr,



At the age of twenty, Hallfreðr fell in love with Kolfinna Ávaldadóttir. Her father was not pleased. He declared that he would not tolerate that Hallfreðr seduced his daughter (61, 62:18), although he was willing to let him marry her, but Hallfreðr was not interested. When Hallfreðr's father Óttarr was faced with Ingólfr's visit to his daughter Valgerðr, he also took the step of offering her in marriage. When Ingólfr refused, Óttarr complained to the young man's father. It may seem strange that in this case Ávaldi did not appeal to Óttarr, Hallfreðr's father,<sup>8</sup> especially since the two older men had been foster brothers.<sup>9</sup> They had grown up together in Norway and had spent their youths on Viking expeditions. From childhood and throughout their youths, however, a clear social distinction can be perceived between them. It is, of course, not surprising that Galti, Óttarr's uncle, states that he considers his nephew the leader of the two, but throughout their youths Ávaldi always deferred to Óttarr. The start capital for their Viking expeditions was acquired when Galti sold "their lands." Supposedly, they also had equal share in the ship that brought them to Iceland. Nonetheless, only Óttarr obtained land in return for the ship, whereas Ávaldi had to work for a year for Óttarr before he was able to settle. While not as pronounced as between Valgerðr and Ingólfr, the social difference between them is still noticeable. Once settled in Iceland, they seem to have avoided each other. Furthermore, it appears that the social difference between the fathers was transferred to their children. Ávaldi may have understood the lesson at an early stage that Óttarr learned only with difficulty, that it was impossible to stop a higher-ranking male from intruding on the sexual integrity of a woman from a lower class.<sup>10</sup>

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as mentioned. One text (61:37) specifically mentions that he stayed with his father. The purpose of the statement is to make clear that he didn't see Kolfinna. On the importance of Christianity in this text, see also John Lindow, "Akkerisfrakki. Traditions Concerning Óláfr Tryggvason and Hallfreðr Óttarsson vandræðaskáld and the Problem of Conversion," in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience: 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim, 3.-9. August 1997* (Trondheim: NTNU, 1997), pp. 409–18.

8. Despite Kalinke, "Stæri ek brag," p. 55.

9. The difference in status between Óttarr's and Ávaldi's families in Norway is indicated by the fact that Óttarr was fostered by Ávaldi's father. When their fathers were killed, the boys sought refuge with Galti, Óttarr's maternal uncle, who undoubtedly had more resources.

10. Bjarni Einarsson, *To skjaldesagaer: En analyse af Kormáks saga og Hallfreðar saga* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1976), p. 136, thinks that Ingólfr behaved in a manner normal

Instead of going to Óttarr then, Ávaldi explained his predicament to his friend Már who lived on the other side of the lake. This was a good choice since Már was the cousin of Þorsteinn, Ingólfr's father and thus related to the mighty Vatnsdælir clan.<sup>11</sup> Only a suitor willing to marry Kolfinna immediately could erase the damage done to her and the family. Normally, however, a father was supposed to wait for a suitor to arrive and could not actively promote his daughter on the marriage market.<sup>12</sup> Már understood this and immediately proposed his friend Gríss Sæmingsson who lived at Geitaskarð in Langadalur, the next valley to the east. He recommended Gríss by saying that he was wealthy, well liked, and had traveled widely, serving the Byzantine emperor with honor. Ávaldi accepted Gríss' candidature and returned home. Már sent a message to Gríss, asking him to come.

When Gríss arrives Már proposes the marriage to Kolfinna, explaining that she is a good party, that there is no lack of money in the family, but adds that he has heard that Hallfreðr Óttarsson often comes to talk with her (*M*: 25).<sup>13</sup> Assembling a party of seven, Gríss and Már set out immediately to make the formal proposal to Ávaldi. Gríss' assets and liabilities become apparent immediately: he is carrying a gold-inlaid spear symbolic of his wealth, but he demonstrates poor eyesight, suggesting he is no longer young. Már presents the case and Ávaldi receives it well, replying that Már shall decide.<sup>14</sup> As the formal engagement is being concluded, Hallfreðr arrives and understands immediately what is happening. Kolfinna tells him curtly to let those decide on her engagement who have the right to do so. She nonetheless

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for the son of a chieftain toward the daughter of a farmer, whereas he does not see a social distinction in Hallfreðr's case.

11. Már had been against Þorsteinn and his brothers in the so-called Hjällaland dispute (*Vtn* pp. 75–81), but Þorsteinn had settled the issue to everybody's satisfaction, and in the last problems Þorsteinn encountered before his death Már was firmly on his side (*Vtn* pp. 92, 95). In other words, by relying on help from his neighbor Már, Ávaldi, the lowest male on the social scale in this story, perhaps unwittingly, bypassed the middle layer, represented by his former foster brother Óttarr, and was able to rely on help from the highest layer in society, the class of chieftains. Már became a faithful supporter of Ávaldi and his family during the length of the dispute. Twenty-five years later it is still Már who encounters Hallfreðr with twenty men to take revenge on behalf of Gríss (*Hallfreðar saga* p. 93).

12. See Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 24–9.

13. 61:19 adds that she is beautiful, stated earlier in *M*: 16.

14. 61:20 suggests a slight hint of female consent by letting Ávaldi express the hope that his daughter will agree with him.



lets Hallfreðr place her on his lap outside the house. The couple is thus visible when the engagement party leaves, at which moment Hallfreðr “pulled her toward him and it came to a few kisses” (*M*: 27). Poor eyesight forces Gríss to ask who this intimate couple might be. When Ávaldi identifies them as Hallfreðr and his daughter Kolfinna, Gríss asks if they often behave in this manner. Ávaldi confirms it but adds that it now is Gríss’s problem since Kolfinna is his fiancée. Before leaving, Hallfreðr assures Gríss that he will become his enemy if he goes ahead with the marriage. When Már responds that Ávaldi has the right to marry his daughter to whom he wants, Hallfreðr delivers two stanzas and leaves angry, returning to Haukagil, his grandfather’s residence.

Gríss, Már, and their party (that did not include Ávaldi) pursued Hallfreðr and his companion who were overpowered and tied down.<sup>15</sup> Gríss’s victory was short-lived, however, because Óláfr, Hallfreðr’s grandfather, had summoned help from Óttarr, his son, and Hallfreðr’s father. The two men encountered Gríss with a large force. Informing Óttarr that his son was “tied down but not killed,”<sup>16</sup> Gríss granted the father sole judgment in the case. When Óttarr had released Hallfreðr from his restraints the son implored him not to allow Gríss to marry Kolfinna. Óttarr responded that Gríss should indeed have the woman<sup>17</sup> and he, Hallfreðr, go abroad. Hallfreðr received the offer with a threat to challenge his rival to a duel.

Óttarr returned home and Hallfreðr finally reached his grandfather’s house. Óláfr sensed that Hallfreðr would not keep the agreement and sent a message to his son-in-law, warning him that trouble might be ahead. He may even have advised that the marriage agreement between Gríss and Kolfinna be broken.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps inspired by Gríss’ unique remedy of temporarily incapacitating Hallfreðr by binding him, Óttarr responded with a remarkable ruse. He sent a message to Hallfreðr that he was gravely ill and asked him to come immediately. It was merely a subterfuge, however, because when Hallfreðr arrived,

15. *F*: XXXII adds the detail that the peaceful Gríss suggests they throw clothes on the two men’s weapons.

16. *F*: XXXIII adds that the latter “would have been more deserved.”

17. *F*: 34 adds that Kolfinna shall be engaged for three years. This is a common feature but it does not fit this case since it would imply that she would be waiting for Hallfreðr.

18. See *Hallfreðar saga*, pp. 27 and 34.

Óttarr placed him in chains and offered him the choice of remaining there or letting him, Óttarr, decide. Reluctantly, Hallfreðr opted for the latter. Accepting money from his grandfather but refusing a share of Óttarr's settlement with Gríss, he went abroad, while Már celebrated Gríss's and Kolfinna's marriage.

Trying to avoid the violence, which invariably resulted from young men's unbridled sexual aggression, Óttarr's behavior was exemplary. When his son had been flirting in an unseemly manner with a young neighborhood girl without being willing to marry her he sent him abroad, thus cutting short the relationship, and he supported the marriage arranged for the dishonored girl. No wonder that Óttarr expected the same behavior from the father of a young man who at the same time was bothering his own daughter. But, before I turn to the story of Valgerðr and Ingólfr, I shall follow the sequel to the relationship within the triangle composed of Kolfinna, Gríss, and Hallfreðr.

In Norway, Hallfreðr became acquainted with Earl Eiríkr and later formed a close personal relationship with King Óláfr Tryggvason, who persuaded him to become a Christian. He returned to Iceland several times, landing in the south where his father was now living. One text states specifically that he stayed with him for the winter, but all three manuscripts stress that he never came to the north to make it clear that he did not see Kolfinna.<sup>19</sup>

A quarter of century later, however—after marriage, children, and widowhood in Sweden—Hallfreðr did land in northern Iceland. He headed straight for the summer pastures and shieling belonging to Gríss where he assumed Kolfinna would be without her husband.<sup>20</sup> Despite Kolfinna's obvious reluctance to receive him, he spent the night with her in the hut and recited insulting poetry about Gríss that he attributed to her.<sup>21</sup> During the night the shepherd had summoned Gríss from the main farm. Arriving a short time after Hallfreðr's departure, Gríss found his wife depressed (*skappúng*, p. 91), a condition clearly not

19. See *Hallfreðar saga*, p. 37.

20. 61:83 indicates that Hallfreðr's return took place during the Spring after King Óláfr had sent Leifr Eiríksson to Greenland and 61:94 places it in connection with the battle at Svöldr.

21. For further analysis of this scene, see Jenny Jochens, "Representations of Skalds in the Sagas 2: Gender Relations," in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. R. Poole (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 309–32.

the result of Hallfreðr leaving, but of the forced intercourse. As often happened in times of stress to men not otherwise known as poets, Gríss composed a stanza in which he expressed outrage and described the sad looks of his wife (91: st. 25).

Accompanied by his relative Einarr Þórisson,<sup>22</sup> Gríss set out after Hallfreðr and caught up with him as he was crossing the river. Gríss threw a spear against Hallfreðr who caught it in mid-air and returned it, killing Einarr. Gríss did not pursue Hallfreðr who spent the winter at Óttarsstaðir, the parental farm managed since Óttarr's death by the younger son Galti. During this time, Hallfreðr composed insulting verses about Gríss.<sup>23</sup> At this point Hallfreðr had thus committed three crimes against Gríss: the rape of his wife Kolfinna, the killing of his kinsman Einarr, and the insulting verses. The poetic insult finally spurred Gríss into action. With Einarr killed, he could still count on his friend Már and his brother-in-law Brandr, Kolfinna's brother. Additionally he now sought support and advice from Húnrröðr whose *þingmaðr* he was. Húnrröðr lived at Móberg in Langadalur to the south of Gríss's own farm. On Hallfreðr's side was his brother Galti and he requested support from his relative Þorkell krafla, the current chieftain of the district. Married to a sister of Hallfreðr's mother, Þorkell was the son of a cousin of Ingólfr whom he had replaced at Hof. Þorkell was willing to arbitrate if Hallfreðr would offer concession to Gríss. Admitting that he had gone too far in his dealings with Gríss, Hallfreðr agreed. According to the text in *Möðruvallabók*, Húnrröðr urged Gríss to prosecute but did not specify the charges; on his own Gríss selected only one, the killing of Einarr (96). In the two other versions (61 and *F*) Húnrröðr recommended prosecution of the killing and of the verses, but he suggested that the Kolfinna case be kept quiet, because, as he said, "it is more ugly" (*F*, 61: 96), indicating the common disapproval of Hallfreðr's behavior.

During the negotiations at the *þing*, Brandr, Gríss's brother-in-law, killed Galti, Hallfreðr's brother. Hallfreðr and Þorkell demanded that Gríss deliver the murderer, but thanks to a ruse of Þorkell—by which he paid back an old debt to Brandr's mother—the young man escaped

22. 61:91 makes him Gríss' *systrungr*, but he is not known elsewhere.

23. 61:95 and *F*: 93 identify these verses as *hálfnúð*. Kari Ellen Gade is undoubtedly correct when in an unpublished lecture she suggested that these stanzas are the ones Hallfreðr recited to Kolfinna in bed.



in female disguise.<sup>24</sup> Hallfreðr was furious and challenged Gríss to a duel. The denouement to this tense situation came through the indirect intervention of King Óláfr, recently deceased. Appearing in a dream to Hallfreðr, he encouraged him to abandon the duel and accept settlement, because Gríss “has prayed to God for victory for the one who has the better case” (*M*: 99). Hallfreðr accepted the advice unmindful of his companions’ teasing that he now was afraid of “the hog” (a play on Gríss’s name). Þorkell settled the case in such a way that the killings of Einarr and Galti compensated each other in view of the fact that the difference between the two dead men (social difference combined with their degree of kinship to the protagonists) was considered to make up for the *heimsókn* of Kolfinna. Normally used about theft and attack, the word *heimsókn* suggests the seriousness with which Hallfreðr’s visit was considered. To pay for the insulting poetry, Hallfreðr must give Gríss a treasure of Hallfreðr’s own choosing (to avoid parting with gifts from the king requested earlier by Gríss). Reluctantly, Hallfreðr complied. Deeply affected by the news of the king’s death, Hallfreðr decided to return to Norway and placed his sister Valgerðr in charge of Óttarsstaðir.<sup>25</sup>

This decision provides a good transition to examine Valgerðr’s life. At the time when Hallfreðr began his flirtation with Kolfinna, Valgerðr became acquainted with Ingólfr, oldest son of the chieftain at Hof and known as the best looking man in the north.<sup>26</sup> The relationship started during a ball game arranged at Grímsstungur, Óttarr’s farm. The men played and the women watched. Ingólfr threw the ball in Valgerðr’s direction and she hid it under her cloak, saying that the person who had thrown it should fetch it.<sup>27</sup> Ingólfr forsook the game and talked with her for the rest of the day, finding her, as we saw, “remarkably beautiful” (*Vtn*: 99).<sup>28</sup>

24. A fuller version of this part of the story is found in *Vtn* pp. 115–24.

25. Daniel Sävborg provides an interesting comparison between the love theme in *Hallfreðar saga* and *Kormáks saga*; see his *Saga om kärleken: Erotik, känslor och berättarkonst i norrön litteratur*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Historia Litterarum 27 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2007), pp. 396–439.

26. Both sagas include a stanza that describes the infatuation of women, from the youngest to the oldest, with the handsome man. He was undoubtedly known as a womanizer, and he was humorously aware of his good looks. Near death he asked to be buried, not in the mound used by his kinsmen but closer to the road to enable the girls from the Vatnsdalur region to remember him better (*Vtn* p. 109).

27. This is a rare occasion of a woman taking the initiative to a sexual relationship.

28. The two fullest accounts are in *Vtn* and in the *M* version of *Hallfreðar saga*. (The

Ingólfr's regular visits to Valgerðr from then on displeased Óttarr. Speaking to the young man and asking him to refrain, he added that he would not tolerate his provocations, but would rather give him his daughter to marry with honor than see her seduced with shame. Ingólfr answered that he intended to come and go as he pleased and that no dishonor accrued to Óttarr (*Vtn*: 99). With a direct reference to his father's prominent position he made it clear (in *M*: 21 and 61:31), that considering the situation in the valley he was not going to take orders from anyone.<sup>29</sup> Thus rebuffed by Ingólfr, Óttarr went to his father Þorsteinn and asked him to rein in his son because he, Óttarr, considered Þorsteinn "a wise man with good intentions" (*M*: 23). Þorsteinn assured Óttarr that Ingólfr was acting against his will but he promised to speak with him. Upbraiding his son in a speech reminiscent of one his own grandfather, also named Þorsteinn, had received from his father Ketill back in Norway,<sup>30</sup> Þorsteinn made Ingólfr stop his visit for a while. Unfortunately, his feelings for Valgerðr were so strong and his frustration over their separation so intense that, although not known as a poet before, he composed and recited a love poem in the forbidden genre of *mansöngsvísur*, thereby merely increasing Óttarr's anger.

Óttarr again went to Þorsteinn and asked permission to prosecute his son at the *þing*. According to the main version of the story in *Hallfreðar saga*, the father would not prohibit it, but, knowing the temperament of his relatives—a reference to his brother Jökull who was present—neither could he recommend it (*M*: 23). Instead, having obtained Óttarr's permission, Þorsteinn settled the case himself. With the case fresh in his mind concerning his own son, Óttarr was undoubtedly not prepared for Þorsteinn's decision. Like Þorsteinn at this moment, Óttarr earlier had asked Gríss for permission to settle his case against Hallfreðr. He acted admirably, as we saw, giving Gríss complete satisfaction by sending his own son abroad and guaranteeing Gríss's engagement to Kolfinna. In contrast, Þorsteinn offered only a minor concession to Óttarr, granting him the fine of half a hundred of silver, but ordering him to sell his land and leave the district.

*F* version is almost identical to the latter). Shorter versions are found in 62:20–21 and 61:30–35.

29. The clan's prestige, in particular in marriage alliances, is stated most clearly in connection with the marriage of Þorsteinn, Ingólfr's father (*Vtn* pp. 71–2).

30. Cf. *M*: 22 and *Vtn* 99 with *Vtn* pp. 4–5.



In *Vatnsdœla saga*, the high-handedness of the chieftain and his family is even more pronounced. When Óttarr complained about Ingólfr's verse-making, Þorsteinn excused himself by saying that he had spoken to his son but without effect. Óttarr retorted that Þorsteinn should either pay fines for his son or allow Óttarr to prosecute him. When Þorsteinn offered no objections, Óttarr initiated a court case. Jökull, however, became furious at the possibility that Þorsteinn and his family might be outlawed from their own lands. Claiming that his brother was getting old, he was ready to settle the case with violence since he was not well trained in law. During the winter, Ingólfr asked his father for advice about the proceedings in the upcoming case at the Húnavatnsþing, warning him that otherwise he would sink an ax in Óttarr's head. Apparently sensing his growing weakness, Þorsteinn asked Ingólfr to assume the position as chieftain from now on. When Óttarr presented his case at the court, Ingólfr and his uncle broke up the proceedings and prevented the case from being heard. Later Óttarr told Óláfr, his father-in-law, that he would not remain in the area but planned to sell his land and move away. He bought land in Norðrárdalur in the Borgarfjörður region, calling his new place Óttarsstaðir.

In other words, Óttarr who had forced his son to leave the country to prevent him from causing sexual harassment to a neighboring family was himself forced to leave the region, in which he had spent his adult life, in order to remove his daughter and thereby prevent another young man from provoking similar trouble. Whether Þorsteinn ordered Óttarr to leave or whether the latter left of his own free will because Ingólfr's behavior prevented him from a hearing at court, both fathers may have assumed that although they had not been able to stop Ingólfr's visits to Grímsbungur, the removal of Valgerður to the more distant Óttarsstaðir might eliminate the problem. In this hope, however, they were profoundly disappointed. We recall that the epilogue to the Kolfinna-Hallfreður story did not occur for several decades, but no break intervened in the Valgerður-Ingólfr romance. When Þorsteinn died a short time later, Ingólfr married, but this didn't prevent him from continuing his relationship with Valgerður.<sup>31</sup> Although she was no longer

31. Like Óttarr, Ingólfr married a daughter of Óláfr at Haukagil. The author of *Vtn* specifies that she was younger than her sister, the mother of Valgerður (38:100). A third daughter married Þorkell krafla from the following generation (61:95).



nearby, her new domicile was conveniently located on Ingólfr's route to and from the *þing* meetings. Óttarr's displeasure was undoubtedly augmented by Valgerðr's complicity: she made fashionable clothing for her lover. In the semiotics of saga narrative the sewing of shirts or other clothing was a sure sign of love.

Deciding on revenge for both Ingólfr's behavior toward his daughter and his own humiliation at the Húnavatnsþing, Óttarr took two actions.<sup>32</sup> In the first, he sent a certain Þórir to the north with the mission of killing either Ingólfr or his brother Guðbrandr. Þórir did not succeed but was himself killed. Perfectly aware of the instigator behind this attack, the brothers headed straight for Óttarsstaðir. Since Óttarr had secured reinforcements, the brothers were forced to a settlement whereby Óttarr agreed to a fine of a hundred silver for his scheme but nothing was paid for Þórir. Furthermore, Óttarr managed to insert into the agreement the condition that Ingólfr could be slain unprotected by the law if he came to visit Valgerðr again without being in the company of Guðbrandr. Since the relationship clearly had been continuing, Óttarr did not expect it to cease. He merely tried to cloak it with respectability by making Ingólfr's brother his chaperone. That he expected, and perhaps hoped, that Ingólfr would not obey this rule is indicated by the proviso that would allow him to kill Ingólfr with impunity. At the end of the meeting, Ingólfr warned Óttarr against sending further hostile expeditions his way, assuring him that the next time he would not escape with a fine.

Óttarr nonetheless tried again. The second time, he hired a certain Svartr to cut off Ingólfr's hand or foot or kill Guðbrandr. He succeeded in the latter but died in the process. Despite his previous threat to Óttarr, Ingólfr was forced to accept a compromise worked out by friends of the two men, because he had not kept his agreement with Óttarr concerning Valgerðr. Óttarr paid three hundred pieces of silver for the killing of Guðbrandr. In return Ingólfr obtained acknowledgment that his breach of the agreement over Valgerðr would be disregarded. In other words, Ingólfr continued his visits and Guðbrandr's death now eliminated the chaperone.

Ingólfr did eventually die, but his death was not caused by Óttarr

32. This part of the story is found only in *Vm*, see pp. 39–40:101–9.

but by thieves ranging throughout the country.<sup>33</sup> Wounded in battle against them, Ingólfr died of his wounds the following summer. It is easy to imagine Óttarr's glee and Valgerðr's grief at the news. With Ingólfr out of the way, Óttarr was able to arrange Valgerðr's marriage to a local man from Stafaholt nearby.<sup>34</sup> By then she was probably in her early forties and she may not have had children. She was therefore free to obey Hallfreðr's summons fifteen years later to take care of Óttarsstaðir, the parental farm, while he returned to Norway. After Hallfreðr's death, his son by the same name lived at Óttarsstaðir with his family, and we may assume that Valgerðr returned to Stafaholt.

As in other stories involving the topos of the illicit love visit, the two interrelated romances of Hallfreðr's and Ingólfr's involvement with Kolfinna and Valgerðr produced violence both initially and over time. A clear distinction involving social class, however, is perceptible in the two cases.<sup>35</sup> Ingólfr, a young man from the class of chieftains, was able to establish a relationship with Valgerðr despite both hers and his own father's opposition. Even after she moved away and he married another woman, he kept up the relationship until his death. In contrast, when Hallfreðr, a man from the class of free farmers, sought to establish a similar relationship with Kolfinna, a woman only slightly below his own rank, the opposition of their fathers effectively barred him and he was sent abroad. Although he did not forget Kolfinna, his brief relationship with her years later was pursued less out of love for her than of spite for her husband.

Turning to the two women, there seems to be no doubt about Valgerðr's initial attraction to the handsome Ingólfr; furthermore, as

33. One of the targets was Óláfr at Haukagil. As long as Óttarr had lived at Gríms-tungur Óláfr had been closely allied with this son-in-law, as we have seen. When Óttarr was forced to move to the south, it became more convenient for Óláfr, now getting on in years, to rely on Ingólfr, another son-in-law who lived close by at Hof. Appealing to him for help against the thieves, Óláfr admonished him to be careful, assuring him that his safe return was more important than to discover the whereabouts of the stolen goods.

34. This information is found only in *Vtn* (p. 109).

35. I have stressed the importance of social class in this analysis. Naturally the role of personality and character is also important. It is worth noticing, however, that the ideal social behavior was that of moderation, *bóf*, which entailed a certain amount of aggression, but not too much. This characteristic is found primarily among successful chieftains thus adding to the social distinction. On this issue see Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London: Penguin, 2001), chs. 10 and 12.

time went by she seemed to develop a genuine love for him, marrying another man only after Ingólfr's death. The feelings of Kolfinna for Hallfreðr are more difficult to interpret. The only sign she might have loved him is the authorial comment that there was no great love between her and Gríss at the beginning of their marriage. Later, however, during Hallfreðr's unexpected visit she professed that she and her husband got along well, as was expected in any marriage, and that she was not happy to see her old suitor. It is worth noticing the reproductive careers of the four protagonists. It may be no coincidence that although Ingólfr and Hallfreðr each fathered two sons with their legal wives, children are not reported for Valgerðr and for Kolfinna. This may reflect authorial attitudes toward the topos of illicit love visit, or, if biographically correct, that Kolfinna's husband was old and Valgerðr was married relatively late, undoubtedly also to an older man; for both couples conception may have been excluded. These two stories suggest that illicit love visits generally led to violence and only occasionally provided romantic and sexual satisfaction, primarily for men, while preventing women from their reproductive function.

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